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INADEQUATE CONGRESSIONAL SALARIES.

BY THE HON. JONATHAN CHACE, EX-UNITED STATES SENATOR
FROM RHODE ISLAND.

UPON my recent resignation from the United States Senate, a Washington correspondent sent a communication to his newspaper saying that I had resigned because the compensation was too small. Nothing could be further from the truth. The statement is a fabrication, without the least foundation. In connection with that statement was published part of the remarks of Senator Platt in the Senate on the inadequacy of the compensation of Senators. While I do not feel called upon to deny the statements of anonymous newspaper men, this circumstance furnishes a convenient text upon which to construct an article upon the subject.

The history of the legislation in regard to the salaries of Members is curious. In 1873 an act was passed increasing these salaries from five thousand dollars to seven thousand five hundred dollars per annum. The law was retroactive, going back two years in its operation. Immediately the newspaper press all over the land set up a universal howl. Day after day, and week after week, hundreds of presses poured forth a flood of indignant condemnation. Legislators who would have spurned, as the plague, an unworthy motive, who had led spotless lives, and whose names were the synonyms of integrity and uprightness, found themselves satirized and mocked at in the daily papers as thieves. This was pointed at as evidence of the decadence of moral fibre in public men ; a new and startling evi-

dence of the growing greed for pelf which had at last invaded the temple of liberty itself, and corrupted the fountain-head of the Nation. For accepting the back pay, Members were relegated to private life in disgrace. In a paroxysm of abject fear, Congress made haste to repeal the law, and again reduced their pay to five thousand dollars per annum. That should never have been done. It was a case of truckling to mere noise.

There was nothing new about this retroactive feature of the law. Seven times since the adoption of the Constitution had laws been enacted increasing the pay of Members of Congress. In every instance those laws were retroactive, varying from a few days to seventeen months. By the act of September 22, 1789, the compensation of Senators and Representatives in Congress was fixed at six dollars a day, and thirty cents a mile for travelling to and from the seat of Government. This rate was to continue until March 4, 1795. The same act fixed the compensation from March 4, 1795, to March 4, 1796 (at which last-named date, by its terms, it expired), at seven dollars a day, and thirty-five cents a mile for travelling. This act was retroactive, extending back six months and eighteen days, viz., to March 4, 1789. The act of March 10, 1796, fixed the compensation at six dollars a day, and thirty cents a mile for travelling. (This act extended back over six days only.) The act of March 19, 1816, fixed the compensation at fifteen hundred dollars a year, "instead of the daily compensation," and left the mileage unchanged. This act was retroactive, extending back one year and fifteen days, viz., to March 4, 1815. (This act was repealed by the act of February 6, 1817, but it was expressly declared that no former act was thereby revived.) The act of January 22, 1818, fixed the compensation at eight dollars a day, and forty cents a mile for travelling. This act was retroactive, extending back fifty-three days, viz., to the assembling of Congress, December 1, 1817. The act of August 16, 1856, fixed the compensation at three thousand dollars and left the mileage unchanged. This act was retroactive, extending back one year, five months, and twelve days, viz., to March 4, 1855. The act of July 28, 1866, fixed the compensation at five thousand dollars a year, and twenty cents a mile for travelling (not to affect mileage accounts already accrued). This act was retroactive, extending back one year, four months, and twenty-four days,

viz., to March 4, 1865. The act of March 3, 1873, fixed the compensation at seven thousand five hundred dollars a year and actual travelling expenses—the mileage already paid for the Forty-second Congress to be deducted from the pay of those who had received it. This act was retroactive, extending back two years, viz., to March 4, 1871.

Stationery was allowed to Senators and Representatives without any special limit, until March 3, 1868, when the amount for stationery for each Senator and Member was limited to \$125 for the session. This was changed by a subsequent act, taking effect July 1, 1869, to \$125 a year. The act of 1873 abolished all allowance for stationery and newspapers.

Those men have excellent company. Since 1789, all the way down, great, good, and distinguished men of every party have received back pay, have been “salary-grabbers.” If it be now pronounced a crime, our national Roll of Honor must be sadly blotted. But what is the argument of these self-constituted censors of public virtue? They say one Congress may properly vote an increase for the next. “If the Forty-second Congress had voted an increase for the Forty-third, that would have been honest.” The “Pickwickian” idea seems to possess these critics that men must not vote themselves money. But how about the men in that Congress who were already elected to another, and the Senate, which is a continuing body? Upon their theory, a majority of the Senate must, in honor, always vote against an increase, because a majority of the Senators always hold over from one Congress to another. Congress makes no contract with the people. Its members are the sole judges of what compensation they shall pay themselves, and the people so understand it, the only limitation being the law of reason.

The country is rich and prosperous, and the people are not only willing to see, but they take a pride in seeing, the men who represent them enabled to live in a manner befitting the important position which they occupy before the world. The simple question is: Is five thousand dollars a reasonable salary for the service and the conditions surrounding it? My judgment is that, if a consensus of opinion of those who have recently left Congress could be arrived at, it would be found to be overwhelmingly that the pay should be largely increased. I am sure that Members who have spoken are nearly unanimous. The honest judgment of

Members still in service, apart from a feeling of selfishness, is that the present pay is very inadequate.

Members of Congress receive.....	\$5,000
The Secretary of the Senate receives.....	6,000
Circuit judges receive.....	6,000
Cabinet officers receive.....	8,000
The Speaker of the House receives.....	8,000
Foreign ministers receive from.....	\$7,500 to 17,500
Judges of the Supreme Court receive.....	10,000
The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court receives.....	10,500
(The Judges of the Supreme, Circuit, and District Courts, may, under certain conditions, retire under full pay.)	
Inter-State-Commerce Commissioners receive.....	\$7,500
A Major-General in the army receives.....	7,500
The Lieutenant-General of the Army receives.....	11,000
(retiring at sixty-two with three-quarters pay).	
In the Navy on sea-duty the Rear-Admiral receives.....	6,000
Vice-Admiral receives.....	9,000
Admiral receives.....	13,000
(with provision for retiring under three-quarters pay).	
The Solicitor General receives.....	7,000
The Vice-President receives.....	8,000
The President receives.....	50,000

A great many presidents of banks and insurance companies receive salaries of from \$10,000 to \$15,000. The president of an insurance company in New York did receive \$40,000. Railroad presidents are paid from \$10,000 to \$25,000. Railroad superintendents are paid from \$10,000 to \$15,000, and the managers of the great industrial enterprises earn and receive similar salaries. Men eminent in law and medicine, without number, earn much larger sums. Aldace F. Walker, one of the Inter-State-Commerce Commissioners, relinquished his salary of \$7,500, it is said, to take the chairmanship of the Inter-State-Railroad Association, at a salary of \$25,000. There is nothing in either of the positions enumerated above, bearing those high salaries, which calls for broader previous training or better mental equipment in order to discharge successfully the duties, than is necessary for a useful Senator or Member of the House. The Judges of the Supreme Court of the United States are men very eminent in their profession, but their places could easily be filled from either House, nor are their duties more arduous. The routine duties of Members and the personal demands of their constituents wear out their energies, and prevent the necessary attention to the philosophy of legislation, the science of government, and the study of National questions.

Long service is necessary to the best equipment, and these years are taken out of the best of a man's life, when, if ever, he is to make the necessary provision for his declining years and for his

family after him. Year after year, and every year, we see men in either house, of strong physique and tough mental fibre, break down from excessive overwork. Some die ; others retire with broken constitutions. It is within reasonable bounds to say that most Congressmen spend fourteen out of twenty-four hours in active mental occupation, oftentimes of the most exacting character. Every one of them needs a paid assistant, capable of rendering such services as cannot be procured for a small salary. Some need two or three. What is there in the service of a Cabinet officer, a Circuit Judge, a Commerce Commissioner, a second- or third-class Minister, a Major-General, a Vice-Admiral, or a Solicitor General, which calls for higher qualifications or larger compensation than a Senator receives ?

What in connection with the Presidential office calls for ten times the pay of a Senator ? The duties or obligations, official or social, are not ten times as great. Is it a matter of National dignity ? The office of a Senator is second only to that of the President. He shares the Senators' legislative prerogative through the veto power; they share with him the appointments and the treaty-making power. Washington is becoming the social and intellectual, as well as the political, capital of the country. The Congressional Library attracts students. The Medical Museum and Library, unexcelled in the world, the National Museum, the Smithsonian, the Hydrographic Office, the Fish Commission, the great Bureau of Ethnology, and the Geological Survey, with its splendid scientific corps built up by Major Powell and his able assistant, James C. Pilling, are constantly attracting to the city people eminent in art, science, and literature. All must meet and be entertained by Senators and Members. Every turn of the social wheel increases cost.

Do you say the salary has been increased two and a half times ? The exactions of society, of politics, of charity, are ten-fold. With the great increase of population in the country has also come a great increase of individual activity. The growth of commercial, mechanical, and business activities, with the wonderful facility of communication, causes the constituent to impinge with increased force upon his Representative. The two Senators from New York, no doubt, represent more people to-day than did the whole of the first Senate, and the city of New York probably does more business than the whole country did then; and when it

is known that each Member has in his keeping the interests of the whole sixty millions of people, it is readily seen how greatly his responsibilities are multiplied. The Senate has been characterized as a "millionaire club." Fully one-half are men of small or no means. A large proportion of the rest are men of moderate fortune. A few are rich, and there are three or four great estates. The wealth is nearly evenly divided between the two sides of the chamber. In the House the only great fortune in the Fiftieth Congress was on the Democratic side. The argument that small means or paucity of the salary lays Members open to temptation is not justified by the facts. I repudiate that. Many years of careful observation lead me to the conclusion that few Members are, or could be with safety, approached by corrupt offers. They are, as a body, not only among the ablest, but the best, men in the Nation, and have been so Congress after Congress. The cause rests upon other and better grounds. Much of the best talent, the stanchest integrity in the land, is found among men of small means.

No man likes to put himself in a position where he cannot live in a style comporting with the average of his associates, or spend the best years of his life with the probability of finding himself at the end of the term worn out, and nothing saved for his declining years. It is no argument to say that there are hosts of candidates. The weight of the argument is that it is inequitable. It is unbecoming in a great Nation to pinch the salaries of those who occupy an office so great in the eyes of the world; nor do the people desire it. Members of Congress feel it to be their right to receive more adequate pay, but are deterred from fear of adverse criticism by the press. Had the office not been elective, the salary would long since have been doubled.

JONATHAN CHACE.